

THE  
BISHOP  
OF  
LONDON'S  
EIGHTH  
LETTER

To his  
CLERGY,  
Upon a  
CONFERENCE  
*How they ought to behave themselves*  
UNDER THE  
TOLERATION.

*Henry Compton, Bp of London*

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[ 3 ]

Bishop of L O N D O N's

E I G H T H

L E T T E R

TO HIS

C L E R G Y, &amp;c.

Good BROTHER,



T is now Three Years since I first begun this Conference in my Diocese; and therefore it can be no wonder, if many of you should have forgot what Discourse passed upon this occasion: For I began in 1689. and concluded not till the last Summer 1691.

But besides this, and my constant Custom of communicating to you from time to time the substance of what had been the entertainment of our Conference: I find my self obliged to publish the Heads of this Conference, and in what manner we pursued it, that I may take off the Edge of some unadvised and false Representations that have been made, as if I de-

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signed

signed to disturb and interrupt that Repose which the Laws have given to Dissenters. Whereas, God is my Witness, I had no such Thoughts; but as much the contrary as possible. Which will best appear by what follows.

I. It was enquired, What Discipline we had left for the support of our Church, since the Act of *Toleration*. And this we did, by considering what Statutes were suspended, upon that account: and what Conditions were to be observed by such, as should have the benefit of that Suspension. For it is a very reasonable Proverb, *Even Reckonings make long Friends*. Should we break in upon one anothers Boundaries, and not keep every one within his own Line; it would cause such continual Strife and Debate, as would inevitably bring in *Confusion and every evil Work*. But if we will be limited by those Rules, which the Law has set, and be careful not to intrench upon one anothers Privileges: This will be the only means to create a Confidence and good Understanding among us for the conservation of the publick Peace. For such Behaviour will naturally allay the Bitterness of Dissention, and quench the Coals of Schism: It will render Charity triumphant over Division; and, if it were possible, make us one Spirit, tho of different Minds. A care not to offend, carries so many Charms with it, that it tames the wildest Beasts: it gives that security of Peace and Repose,



Repose, that it perswades or shames the worst of Tempers into an acquiescence.

And here I presume to lay one Argument before you; which I should think, if discretely handled, would very much work upon those, that differ from us. There is a great noise made, about the Church enjoying the Observation of things in themselves indifferent. And yet I question not, but that the severest Opposers of this will confess, that the secular Power may determine the use of such things. For otherwise there would be an end of all Government, Societies, good Order and Peace in the World: The Conservation of which consists mostly in such Laws as are taken up about things indifferent, or such indifferent Circumstances of Time, Place, Manner or the like, as would render all ineffectual, if not prescribed. But if it shall be said, This must not be done, but where there is sufficient Reason for it: this sets all to Sea again, and whilst the infinite Varieties of mans Reasonings are afloat, no Law can live in such a Storm as they will raise. And we do not find, that God has given any other Method for establishing the outward Decency and Order of the Church, than what is common to all other Societies of Men, Civil or Military. Nay the state of the Church is declared to be a Spiritual Warfare. And we know nothing is more rigorous, than Military Discipline, even in the minutest things.

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We may therefore certainly conclude, that things indifferent in themselves do not hang so loose to the world : but that for the good of mankind they may be restrained from their neutrality. No Body of men in the world can carry on any common purpose, without this power over things indifferent. Should they not deny their Private Liberty, by agreeing to Time and Place, and by tying themselves up to some Rules : it would be like the Confusion of *Babel*, or like an Army armed at all adventures, where there might possibly be found more weapons to offend every one his next man, than to annoy his enemy. So that I do not think I wronged any religious Sect of men in the world : if I should say, there is none but what finds it self obliged in some measure to retrench Private Liberty for the sake of Common Convenience.

The true Difference then betwixt the Necessity that lies upon things necessary in their own nature, and that which lies upon things indifferent is ; that the one is alwaies so, and the other only upon occasion. Which agrees with the just and wise Declaration of our Church. *The Ceremonies retained are for a Discipline and Order, which for a just cause may be altered and changed : and therefore are not to be esteemed equal with God's Law.* The case being thus, I would gladly know, whether we that obey the Laws made about things indifferent, do not come nearer up to the Precept, *Submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's*

*Lord's sake*, than they that insist upon an unconfined Liberty.

I must confess by the Principles of some, and the Practice of others, one would think there were no Power of God in Rulers, but what were controulable by the will of the Subject: and that Laws were no longer in force, than men had a mind to keep them. But what would be the fate of such a precarious Government, our present unhappy and self-destroying Divisions give but too broad an intimation. Not but that there are times and seasons to do things beyond common allowance. But it is neither convenient to prescribe particulars in such cases beforehand, nor possible to come to an end of them. And therefore it has been the wisdom of all Governments to let alone such Decisions, till the exigency of affairs call for them. And if at any time some upstart scoundrel pretence of a Government has done otherwise, it proved one of the things that most exposed their folly. There may be indeed general Rules, such as our Saviour's for dispensing with positive Laws, tho of Gods own making, *Man was not made for the sabbath, but the sabbath for man*, and that which surmounts all, *Necessity has no Law*: but the Laws; as I may call them, for such particular occasions, must arise out of the exigencies themselves, and either stand or fall by the Judgement of Mankind.

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II. The thing we next considered, was how to prevent the Abuses, ill men might make of this Liberty : who, we might easily perceive, would be apt to pervert the easiness of the Government, which was intended to favour weak Consciences, into an occasion of Profaness and Disorderliness. For we find already how much forwarder wicked men are to abuse this Indulgence, than others to be thankful for it. There are numbers of late, who have forsaken the Church, not to go to a Meeting; but either to the Ale-house, or to loyter in the fields, or to stay at home, and that sometimes to follow worldly Business.

I. To suppress these grievous Disorders, as much as may be; we thought the first step to be made, was to call upon the Civil Magistrate. For the Laws are many and strict against Tipling, Swearing, and the like. So that if the Justices would but seriously and conscientiously set themselves to the execution of them: it could not miss of having a very good effect. Especially if they would distinguish the profane withdrawers from those that are protected by the Act of Toleration, by making them to pay twelve pence a Sunday according to the Statute of Queen Elizabeth.

For the Secular Powers are not less concerned in their Province to discourage Idleness and Debauchery upon a Temporal account; than we are to do it upon  
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a Religious one. Let them but consider what mortal wounds such Licentiousness gives to the Commonwealth. It takes off the Strength and Vigour of men; it mightily abates their Care and Industry: And that brings them to Want and Necessity. And what is the consequence of all this? They will not be so able to follow their own business in time of Peace, nor so stout to serve their Country in the Wars. Land will be impoverished for want of due Cultivating, and fall in value. Trade will decay. And this will make Taxes more uneasie every day than other: till Discontent with their present condition makes the people murmur and fond of any Change, and so ripe for Sedition and Rebellion. If then Security be the greatest Blessing to any Nation, when all sorts of people are content and at their ease: what a Curse is it alwaies to be unsafe, and under the continual apprehension of Disturbance! And therefore certainly it does in the highest degree behove the Government to watch against such Disorders, as draw after them so pernicious consequences.

2. The next thing to be done for reforming the Manners of this sort of people, was reasonably judged to be the duty incumbent upon our selves; out of a Spiritual consideration to endeavour by all ways to reduce them to a sober mind, that they might seriously reflect upon those things that belong to their eternal peace. For if we could once make men good Christians, they would infallibly become

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good



good Subjects, good Neighbours, and whatever else might conduce to publick or private convenience. For the effecting of this, we could not think of a better course, nor I believe can we, than to lay that Letter of the Kings before us, which is directed to me to be communicated to the two Provinces of *Canterbury* and *York*, dated the 13th. day of *February* 16<sup>89</sup>. I mean that part of it which directs the Preaching against such Disorderliness, as is taken notice of in the several Acts of Parliament against Blasphemy, Swearing, Perjury, Drunkenness and Prophaning of the Lords day. In the prosecution of which, care ought to be had in the first place to time the several Discourses to the most suitable and proper seasons. Οἱ μὴ ἀγνοοῦντες τοὺς καλούς ὀρθούς, &c. says *Demosthenes*, *Whoever neglects the right season of doing his business; must remember, that the Gods bless no such endeavours.* The meaning of which is, That Providence has set Rules and Measures, and Times and Seasons for all things: and if we will not be directed by them, we put ourselves out of the Conduct and Protection of Providence so far, as not reasonably to expect the favour of it. And therefore the Prophet boasts of his wisdom in this particular, *The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season.* *Ila.* 50. 4.

So that the first thing to be done, is to consider what may be the properest time to Preach upon any of these Subjects above mentioned. For however there

there may be too much reason to make all times seasonable for such Discourses: yet there are some seasons more proper for it perchance than others. As before the *Lent* and *Midsummer* Assizes, to make the people understand the horrid guilt of the sin of Perjury, so pernicious to particular persons, so destructive to Societies, and so highly offensive to Almighty God. To warn your Flocks in the time of *Advent* against the beastly sin of Drunkenness, and that which is the constant Fruit of it, Blaspheming and Swearing: that, if possible, the shameful abuse of *Christmas* Holydaies may, in some measure at least, be prevented; when instead of spiritual Rejoycing and giving of Thanks, nothing but Luxury, Intemperance and the most idle Recreations are indulged. And in my opinion, to take the time betwixt *Easter* and *Whitsuntide* for preaching against the prophanation of the Lords day: Both because *Easter* is the Original of all the rest of the Lords daies: and because it is in the midst of those Primitive Holy days *Goodfriday*, *Easter*, *Ascension* and *Whitsunday*, whose observation seems to be as early as the time of the Apostles.

When we are resolved of the Times: it will be fit to take up a courage suitable to the Cause we undertake. It is Gods Cause: we are Advocates for his Truth. And if God be for us, we ought not to stand in awe of any man. Frowns and threats, nay and ill usage to boot, are but Grimaces, in comparison of his Rewards. And therefore we ought to do our

Duty without respect of persons, applying the words of *St. Paul* to ourselves, *These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.* Tit. 2. 15.

3. Lastly, We should endeavour to prevail with our dissenting Brethren, who Teach in Meetings, to joyn heartily with us in discouraging loose and prophane persons, by keeping them at a distance, and exposing them to the Law. For God knows, it is but too natural for any Society of men to embrace those with all their faults, who will quit another Party to come over to them. But if we could once weather this point: it might be a means to remove many Scandals, which are now given with impunity.

To be sure such a friendly compliance would wonderfully contribute to the reviving that so much decayed and forgotten vertue among us of Christian Charity. *St. Austin* in his Treatise against the *Donatists* concerning Baptism, observes frequently, throughout that Discourse, the great difference there was between the behaviour of *St. Cyprian*, whose authority was urged against him, and that of the *Donatists*; and what different effects they had. Particularly l. 1. c. 18. having taken notice that this Opinion of *St. Cyprian* and his Council of Bishops was declared before any General Council had determined the Point, whether they that had been Baptized by Hereticks or Schismaticks, should be Baptized again, when they returned into the bosom of the Church: He

He marks further, that the Peace of the Church was preserved in the main, because the Communion was not broken. And therefore he willingly closes with them in their Appeal to this holy Martyr, thus expressing himself, *Ut ad illum jam veniam, de cujus sibi autoritate isti carnaliter blandiuntur, cum ejus charitate spiritualiter perimantur.* He chearfully concurs with them in comparing his Case with theirs, since, whilst they so much flattered themselves after a carnal manner with his Authority, they were spiritually confounded by his eminent Charity.

Now tho we are not so happy, as to be able to perswade those that differ from us to hold Church-Communion with us: Yet a familiar and friendly Conversation would go a great way to prevent those many Mischiefs and Scandals, which the irreconcilable and extravagant Separation of the *Donatists* brought upon the Church. It would by degrees discover many Mistakes, and remove many Prejudices. The Difficulties would not seem near so insuperable, our Breaches half so wide, nor the Points in Controversie of near that consequence. Honest, plain, well-meaning Hearts would by this means soon find out one another, and leave the malicious and perverse Designers naked, and destitute of a Cloak for their Knavery. Which might be a means through the help of God's Grace to reclaim even these also at the last, by making them ashamed of the Evil of their ways, when they find themselves so  
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laid open. And thus might we hope once, at the last, to see Truth and Sincerity triumph over Error and Hypocrisie, in this our now unfortunately divided and distracted Nation.

III. In the third place we found it absolutely necessary to lay carefully the first Principles of Religion, by frequent Catechising. For it is certain, the root of all our bitterness proceeds from the want of a timely Institution in the true grounds of Piety and Virtue. But especially ought we to press the Doctrine of *Obedience to Parents and Masters, with due and modest Respect and Behaviour towards Superiors*. For the neglect of this first Obedience and Submission through want of early Instruction, has been the chief Cause of all that Refractoriness and insolent Disobedience to Governours and Magistrates. *He that loves not his Brother, whom he has seen: how can he love God,* says S. John, *whom he has not seen?* So it is in the point of Obedience and Submission; he that obeys not his Parents, whom he sees daily, how shall he obey his Prince whom he neither has, nor it may be ever will see? Therefore God's Law appointed, that a stubborn Son should be put to death, *Deut. 21.* thereby to let us understand, that a disobedient Son would never make a good Subject. For when he is once grown headstrong, he makes no distinction, let who will hold the Reins. If he will not obey his Parents or Master, it is because he is proud, obstinate, and self-will'd:



will'd : and what is a Magistrate to expect from such a Temper ? I wish I could say, that all this empty noise, that we make about Religion and Liberty, were not the Blind to this unhappy Disposition, which has so overspread the Nation with Malice and Contention.

We ought therefore earnestly to set our Hearts upon it. And if we will pull up Dissention by the root, we must possess the Hearts of the People with a just sense of their Duty, at least in that part of Humility, which teaches Submission and studying to be quiet. Let it be the Subject of our Sermons and the Entertainment of our Discourse, as well as the Instruction of our Catechism. Let no opportunity escape the Improvement of this Duty, without which the *Watchman waketh but in vain*. In short, *Hinc ille lachrymæ*; and till this bleating of Rebellion be sacrific'd upon the Altar of Obedience, we must expect no Peace in *Israel*. But if this Virtue once prevail, it will carry along with it that godly Awe and Fear, as cannot fail to work a Reformation of Manners. And for this reason the Psalmist makes it the fore-runner of Repentance, *Stand in awe and sin not*; and the original of that Wisdom which is from above, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. For it is a Quality that so seasons the Heart, that it blesses the increase of all other Christian Virtues. *God gives grace to the humble, 1 Pet. v.*

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But after all, our Instructions will be very lame, without the Concurrence of Parents and Masters of Families. Tho we urge never so powerfully, be our Reasons never so strong, and tho we should speak with the Tongue of Men and Angels, without something of the Bit and Bridle, we shall do but little good. The generality of Youth are not capable of reasoning, and they that are, through the giddiness and folly of their childish Age, cannot attend to it. Alas! We see in those of riper Years, to whom the Excellence of Reason makes a fair shew, whilst it is exercised in the Theory; if you come to attacque their Lusts, by pressing the Rule home to their Practice, it is immediately repulsed with Violence, and overwhelmed oftentimes with a torrent of corrupt Affections. The Vapors of Concupiscence fly up and turn the Brains and dim the Sight, that Men can neither understand what is for their real good, nor see the Mischief into which they are running. The generality of Men have nothing prevalent left them for their preservation, but that which is common to them with Beasts, fear of present danger, and that hardly breaks through the incumbrance of some Passions. For this cause it is, that the Awe of Parents and Masters must first make an impression, and break the sturdiness of Nature at the first entrance upon the days of Youth; if we will expect to do any good afterwards. *With-hold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall*

*shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.* Prov. 23. 13, 14. The Frown of a Parent speaks present Inconvenience; the young Man's present Maintenance is at his Will, as well as his future Hopes. The Displeasure of a Master threatens immediate Mischief; he may turn out of Doors, and make it difficult to get Bread. These are the means to bow the stiff Neck, and make the Refractoriness of Youth comply with Instruction. For this cause then ought the Duty of Parents and Masters to their Families to be as home pressed, as the Reciprocal: And the rather, for that it is generally forgot in this Age. It is not considered, as it should be, what a Charge lies upon those, that have Families: The Blood of the meanest of which, if they miscarry by the ill Example or Neglect of the other, will be required at their hands.

IV. In the last place we can have no reason to expect a Blessing upon our Endeavours, unless they be done with Sincerity. We must not only preach to others the Word of Life; but so behave our selves, as they that would partake with them in the same Blessedness: That by seeing our good Works, they may glorifie our Father which is in Heaven. God indeed may prosper good Instructions to the profit of others; tho they that delivered them, should prove Reprobates: But there is no Thanks due to such a Person, who takes the readiest way to overthrow his good Doctrine by his ill Example.

It may be imagined, that Hypocrisie might supply the defect of a sincere Mind in promoting Godliness. But when the Nature and Designs of Hypocrisie are well considered, and Experience examined upon it, we shall soon be convinced to the contrary. For no Hypocrisie can be laid on so thick, but that the Stains of Vice will in a little time work through it so, that every sincere Eye may perceive it. And therefore we find by sad Experience, that they who lie long under the direction of Hypocrisie, either become Hypocrites themselves, or through Weakness are deluded into the Doctrines of *Balaam*, and ignorantly profess that Evil, which Hypocrites have represented to them for good.

After all, It will not suffice that we avoid giving Scandal in our Lives and Conversation, or forbear the endeavouring to cover it with Hypocrisie: unless we detest doing the work of the Lord negligently. God has declared, that he will spew out those that are lukewarm. If we will be Labourers worthy our hire, we must put on a Spirit suitable to the *High Calling* we are employed about. We have not only to consider the object, which is no less than Eternal Happiness, but the part we have in the pursuit of it. We are to be Lights to others, as well as to our selves. A double diligence is required at our hands; as having taken upon us to watch for others, as well as for our selves. Which will by no means consist with a supine or indifferent behaviour either thro laziness of temper, or too much addition to the world. All  
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works go on, just as they are prosecuted. Where people are intent and vigilant, their undertakings go on prosperously : but where they are remiss and careless, nothing succeeds. There are some Attempts indeed that may be frustrated by reason of insuperable difficulties, or given ~~ver~~ as not worth the toyl and labour : but neither of these Discouragements can justly take place in our case. For the reward is more than sufficient to countervail all that we can undergo, *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. Phil. 3. 8.* and we must never pretend that any Difficulties can be too great for us, when the Holy Ghost has taught every one of us to say, *I can do all things thro Christ which strengthneth me. Phil. 4. 13.* I am persuaded you cannot but have reflected upon these things over and over : since we have almost fresh instances dayly to stir up our minds and awaken us to our Duty. But the Flesh is weak, and will incline us to avoid all hardships, if we will hearken to it. Continual opposition and contradiction is uneasie to flesh and blood : and when it comes from those we seek and take pains to inform better, it must needs be very grievous. But this can be no surprize to those that have heard the words of him that has undergone the contradiction of sinners for us, *In the world ye shall have tribulation.* Therefore in the words of St. Peter, *Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as tho some strange thing happened unto you : but rejoyce, in as much as ye are partakers of Christs sufferings ; that when his*  
*glory*



glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. And The God of all grace who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. Which is the daily Prayer of

Your most Affectionate

Friend and Brother,

H. London.

FINIS

Mar. 29  
1892.

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